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ABSTRACT

To determine what interviewers perceived to be important factors in the interviewing process and whether the sex of the interviewer or type of organization he or she worked for influenced their perceptions of such factors, a questionnaire was administered to 42 personnel managers from randomly selected places of business and government offices. Responses indicated that (1) most interviewers were male, (2) interviewers more often than not made up their minds about hiring an applicant at the time of the first interview, (3) the size of an organization correlated directly with the number of interviews granted, (4) most interviewers wanted the applicant to talk more than listen, (5) the majority of interviewers lacked formal interview training, and (6) most organizations did not give tests to job applicants. When asked what they considered to be the most important attributes of a job applicant, interviewers ranked in their order of importance personality, appearance, job experience, communication skills, education, personal references, resume, and extracurricular activities. (HOD)

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INTERVIEWER PERCEPTIONS

by

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INTERVIEWER PERCEPTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

A. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

Because some of the more recently published business communications texts appear to be devoting an increasing amount of space to the preparation of the resume and the job interview, it was thought timely to learn first-hand, through the use of a specially designed and personally administered questionnaire, what today's interviewers perceive to be important characteristics or factors in the interviewing process; and, whether being male or female, or working for a particular type of organization influences their perceptions or ranking of such factors or characteristics.

B. RESEARCH DESIGN

To obtain this data, which would serve as a guide to the business communications teachers in teaching this area, forty-two personnel managers were surveyed in their offices by a team of business college majors, at randomly selected places of business or government offices, expressing a willingness when contacted to participate in this study. The respondents were located in and around a midwestern urban community with a population of around 60,000. A review of literature dealing with the interview process was also done to gain additional insight into the interviewing process, and to relate these readings to the findings of this survey.

II. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ON RESPONDENTS - Questions 1-4

QUESTION 1. Sex of Respondents: MALE: 76.2% (32) FEMALE: 23.8% (10)

QUESTION 2. Type of Organization:

Type of Organization	% Respondents	Number Respondents
Retail	33.3	14
Services	23.8	10
Food or Beverage	19.0	8
Government Agency	11.9	5
Manufacturing	4.8	2
Other	7.1	3

The three "other" responses were: game arcade, grain elevator, and an art gallery.

QUESTION 3. Approximate Number of People Employed By Respondent Organizations:

Number or Employees	% Respondents	Number Respondents
1 - 5	9.3	4
6 - 10	21.4	9
11 - 25	21.4	9
26 - 50	14.3	6
51 - 100	11.9	5
Over 100	21.4	9

QUESTION 4. Number or Interviews Conducted Per Month By Organizations:

Number of Interviews/Month	% Respondents	Number of Respondents
Up to 5	66.7	28
6 - 10	9.5	4
11 - 25	11.9	5
26 - 50	9.5	4
Over 50	2.4	1

Further analysis of responses to question 4 also showed that large companies tend to interview a large amount of applicants. Smaller companies interview relatively few applicants.

III. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE FINDINGS OF STUDY - Questions 5-16

QUESTION 5. Do you usually make up your mind about hiring an applicant in the first interview?

Yes	52.4% (22)
No	47.6% (20)

The male and remale interviewers responded similarly to this question.

Apparently the first interview is of great importance. This finding supports Gary Dessler, an authority on the interview process who contends that "the game will probably be won or lost during the first few minutes of the interview."

QUESTION 6. What attributes or qualities do you consider most important in hiring an applicant?

To this open-ended question, the most frequent responses were appearance, personality, and positive attitude, followed less frequently by such responses as: shows enthusiasm, has appropriate skills for the job, meets the requirements of the job description, has good eye contact, is on time for the interview, has a knowledge of what their organization does and appears confident.

QUESTION 7. The Importance of an Attractive Resume Prior to or During the Interview.

Response	% Responding	Number Responding
Very Important	7.1	3
Important	50.0	21
Unimportant	42.9	18

Further analysis of question 7 also showed that male and female interviewers differed significantly in their response to this question. Of the females, 20% responded "very important." Of the males only 3.1% responded "very important." The obvious conclusion is that an attractive resume is more important to the female interviewer.

Our results also showed that manufacturing firms find an attractive resume unimportant (100% indicated this--however, the relatively few manufacturing firms in this study, 4.8% (2), possibly skewed these results). 62.5% or 8 food and beverage establishments also felt that an attractive resume was unimportant. When we look at the government agencies, however, all of them, 11.9% (5) stated that an attractive resume was either important or very important.

We found a high (33.3%) correlation between size of company and the importance of an attractive resume the larger companies, more often than the smaller firms, stating that an attractive resume was very important. Since the larger companies also tend to interview a larger number of applicants, a resume may serve as a way of screening out applicants. It follows, therefore, that such companies would consider an attractive resume important.

QUESTION 8. How Organization Usually Obtains Applicants.

Responses	Ranking	% Responded	Number of Responses
Walk-in Applicant	1	40.5	17
Newspaper Ads	2	33.3	14
State Employment Agencies	3	11.9	5
Private Employment Services	4	7.1	3
College Campus Recruiting	5	7.1	3
Other	6	7.1	3

The "other" responses were: school graduate placements, Distributive Education Clubs of America, referrals by other employees.

The above ranking was similar for all types of organizations. However, only the larger companies used college recruitment, ranking it the highest. The smaller companies placed a higher ranking on the use of private employment agencies. Another observation was that companies that preferred private employment agencies do not use state employment agencies, and vice versa. Regardless of the company size, walk-in applicants and newspaper advertisements were ranked very high for obtaining job applicants.

QUESTION 9. Do You Use the Structured, Semi-structured or Unstructured Interview Format?

(Structured - a specific set of questions or format that you follow.)

(Semi-structured - have a format to follow but often deviate from that format.)

(Unstructured - no specific format - ask questions as they come to mind.)

The Results Were As Follows:

Response	Ranking	% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Unstructured	1	54.8	23
Semi-structured	2	33.3	14
Structured	3	11.9	5

Most of the respondents used the unstructured or semi-structured format when interviewing. Of those that responded structured, 60% were female.

When comparing types of organizations and preferred interview formats, we found that interviewers in government agencies are more likely than any other type of organization to use the structured interview format. In contrast, manufacturing, retail, and food and beverage organizations prefer an unstructured format. The service agencies prefer the semi-structured format.

Gary Dessler adds some insights about the interview in his book Personnel Management when he observed that material is not consistently covered when the unstructured interview format is used. George Strauss and Leonard Sayles also supports this view in their book Personnel. They stated that the validity of interviews is higher when interviews are structured rather than unstructured. Our study showed that of the respondents who use the structured or semi-structured interview format, 71.4% did have formal interview training. Our study also showed that 67.9% of the untrained interviewers did not use the structured or semi-structured interview format. Apparently, trained interviewers are more likely to use the semi-structured or structured interviews possibly because their training prepared them to use these formats.

QUESTION 10. During the Interview You Prefer Applicant to Do:

Response	Percent Responses	Number of Responses
More Talking Than Listening	57.1%	24
More Listening Than Talking	28.6%	12
Other (An Equal Amount of Talking and Listening)	14.3%	6

The response "more talking than listening" was consistently equal among males and females, with the females (20%) more often preferring an equal amount of talking and listening as compared to 12% males.

QUESTION 11. Does Your Firm Give Tests to Applicants?

Response	% Responses	Number of Responses
Yes	16.7	7
No	83.8	35

Apparently, most organizations do not give tests. Robert Gatewood and James Tedvika also have observed that testing is very much on the decline and

because of this, interviews are becoming more and more important in the applicant selection process.

QUESTION 12. If you do give tests, briefly describe the type of test.

Of the seven that responded that they did give tests, two were retail firms, which gave aptitude tests; four were government agencies, which gave civil service tests; and one organization was service, which gave a wide variety of tests, depending on the job requirement.

QUESTION 13. (Rank the following factors in their order of preference)

	Ranking	Mean	% Responding	Number Responding
Personality	1	2.557	23.8	10
Personal Appearance	2	2.667	33.3	14
Job Experience	3	3.238	23.8	10
Communication Skills	4	3.833	11.9	5
Education	5	4.381	7.1	3
Personal Reference	6	5.357	2.4	1
Resume	7	6.690	7.1	3
Extra Curricular Activities	8	7.051	2.4	1
Other (Knowledge of Product)	9	7.067	1.0	1

Note: The lower the mean, the higher the ranking of the factor.

QUESTION 14. Do you interview the first few applicants differently than the last few?

Responses	Percent Responses	Number of Responses
No	58.5%	24
Yes	17.1%	7
Not Sure	24.4%	10

QUESTION 15. If yes to Question 14, which applicants are usually judged better?

Because only seven responded to this question, the sampling is too small to draw any significant conclusions. However, of these, 57.1% stated that the first few applicants were usually judged better, explaining that if any of the first few applicants gave a good impression, they were usually hired regardless of the qualities or abilities of the applicants that followed.

QUESTION 16. Did you receive any formal training in interviewing?

Response	Percent of Responses	Number of Responses
Yes	33.3%	14
No	66.7%	28

Apparently the majority (66.7%) of the interviewers had no formal training in interviewing. When the male and female interviewers were compared, 50 percent of the women had formal interview training as compared to only 28.1% of the men.

The importance of interview training was established by John D. Drake who found through several research experiments that trained interviewers are more consistent in selecting like applicants, and in predicting on-the-job performance, thus concluding that interviews serve as good assessment tools if handled by trained interviewers.

IV. CONCLUSIONS BASED ON SURVEY

1. The 42 interviewers in our study were found to be mostly male, outnumbering the female interviewers three to one, 32 males to 10 females. In personnel management, as in other managerial areas, males still appear to dominate the field.
2. Interviewers, more often than not, make up their mind about hiring an applicant at the time of the first interview, tending to favor or select the ones they interview early or first, in the interviewing process.

3. Female interviewers attach greater importance to an attractive resume than do their male counterparts.
4. The size of an organization correlates directly with the number of interviews granted; the larger organizations granting the most and the smaller firms granting the least amount of interviews.
5. Government agencies and large organizations attach greater importance to an attractive resume than do smaller firms. Since large organizations tend to interview a relatively large number of applicants, a resume appears to be an efficient way of screening out or cutting down on the number of applicants interviewed.
6. Government agencies tend to use the more formal structured interview format more often than other types of organizations. In contrast, manufacturing firms, retailers, and food and beverage organizations prefer the informal unstructured interview process. Service organizations prefer the less formal semi-structured format.
7. Most interviewers like the applicant to talk more than listen. To a lesser extent, female interviewers prefer that the applicant do an equal amount of talking and listening.
8. Female interviewers, more often than their male counterparts, use the structured interview format, the males tending to be more informal or casual during the interview.
9. The majority of interviewers, (in this study, 66.7% (28)) lack formal interview training. Interviewers with formal interview training are more often female than male.
10. A high correlation was found between interviewers who used the structured or semi-structured interview format and those who had received interview training.

11. Most organizations do not give tests to job applicants. In this study only seven out of the 42 respondents stated that they gave some kind of test to job applicants.

12. The "most important" attributes or qualities that an interviewer considers in hiring an applicant are listed or ranked in their order of importance, with 1 being the highest: 1) personality; 2) appearance; 3) job experience; 4) communication skills; 5) education; 6) personal references; 7) resume; 8) extra curricular activities; 9) other (knowledge of product or business, good attitude, intelligence, grade point average).

The males and females responding to this question differed slightly in their perception of this ranking, the males attaching the most importance to on-the-job experience. Their female counterparts indicated that communication skills was most important. Interestingly, the resume ranked in the bottom half, or seventh in importance for both males and females, being ranked slightly lower by the male interviewers. The only organization which ranked education as the most important was the service organization. Manufacturing firms ranked previous job experiences as most important. Retail organizations ranked both personal appearance and personality as most important. The food and beverage establishments most often chose personal appearance as being the most important.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON SURVEY

The findings of this study point up the importance of the interview. In fact, the business communications teacher who invests some class time to discussing the importance of the interview and the components which contribute to it being a successful one, will be adding an important dimension to the communications course. To help accomplish this objective, the following recommendations need to be considered:

1. Make a good impression at the intitial job interview, since first impressions appear to be very important in deciding to hire or not to hire someone. To make the right impression you need to:

   a. Project your personality in a way that gives the best representation of yourself--using good eye contact and showing enthusiasm.

   b. Make sure your personal appearance is at its best--dressing neatly and appropriately.

   c. Describe your previous job experiences--trying to spend an equal time talking and listening.

   d. Discuss your qualifications--communicating clearly and skillfully as you do so.

2. Be sure you prepare an attractive resume, expecially for a large organization or a government agency, because they use the resume as a means for selecting or weeding out job appliants.

3. Be prepared when going to an interview that:

   a. A test may be given.

   b. The structured interview may have some technical questions that require exact answers.

   c. The unstructured interview may have some unexpected, open-ended questions, so expect the unexpected to avoid being caught off balance.

4. Try to arrange your interview early in the day, or early in the interview process. It improves your chances for being selected, especially if there are many applicants for the job.

5. If you know or expect to be interviewed by a female, bring along an attractive resume, be ready to talk about your abilities or skills, and listen at least an equal amount. Also, expect a structured or formal interview.

6. If you expect to be interviewed by a male, expect a more free-wheeling, informal, unstructured interview format, be a good listener but be ready to talk about your abilities to handle the job when the opportunity presents itself, and, know something about what their organization does. Although not imperative, it's still wisest to bring along an attractive resume, especially when being interviewed by a large organization, whether it's government or private.
7. If you find an organization that looks attractive, don't hesitate to walk right in to the employment office to see if the company is doing or planning some hiring. In this study, walk-in applicants were the most popular way of hiring, followed closely by hiring through newspaper advertisements.

The importance of the interview was summed up very aptly by Studs Turkel in his book Working, when he said, "The interview is the first hour of the rest of your life."

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